



Republican Policy Committee

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Losing the War Without a Fight:

Clinton's "About Face" War on Drugs

Part II

America is witnessing a dramatic rise in illegal drug use among our youth. This sharp reversal from the steady progress made against illegal drug use throughout the 1980s and early 1990s is the inescapable result of the Clinton Administration's wholesale retreat in the war against drugs. According to a report released in December 1995 by the Senate Committee on the Judiciary under the chairmanship of Senator Orrin Hatch, the official policy adopted by the Clinton Administration has "de-emphasized law enforcement and shifted away from interdiction, while promising dividends from treating hard-core drug users."

According to Chairman Hatch, "the number of Americans using illicit drugs plunged from 24.7 million in 1979 to 11.4 million in 1992. The so-called 'casual' use of cocaine fell by 79 percent between 1985 and 1992, while monthly cocaine use fell 55 percent between 1988 and 1992 alone — from 2.9 million to 1.3 million users." Unfortunately, under the Clinton Administration, drug use has experienced a dramatic resurgence among our youth. *The number of 12-17 year-olds using marijuana increased from 1.6 million in 1992 to 2.9 million in 1994. Since 1992, there has been a 52 percent jump in the number of high-school seniors using drugs on a monthly basis.*

Likewise, the use of stimulants, LSD, and inhalants are likewise on the rise and hospitals report a record number of drug-related emergency-room visits. The Senate Judiciary Committee's report finds the Administration's supply reduction policy in "utter disarray, with a 52 percent drop in our ability to interdict and push back drug shipments in the transit zone [an area which includes the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico, and parts of the Eastern Pacific]." The drug culture, one which nurtures only crime, poverty, and despair, is flourishing in the absence of a credible drug control policy.

The results of Clinton's misguided policy: *America is losing the war on drugs and losing badly.*

Losing the Drug War

According to the Judiciary Committee report, *Losing Ground Against Drugs: A Report on Increasing Illicit Drug Use and National Drug Policy*:

► **Youthful drug use is up sharply:**

- In September 1995, the Department of Health and Human Services released the

National Household Survey on Drug Abuse which showed that marijuana use had increased by an average of 50 percent among young people.

- "Recent marijuana use" was up a staggering 200 percent among 14-15 year-olds; and among 12-13 year-olds, use was up 137 percent according to the same survey.
- Past-month use of marijuana rose 110 percent for 8th graders, 95 percent for 10th graders and 60 percent among 12th graders, between 1992 and 1994 [Source: *Monitoring the Future*, December 1994].

► ***Trends in hard-core drug use:***

- According to the most recent 1995 Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) survey, cocaine-related emergency room episodes hit their highest level in history in 1994.
- Further, marijuana-related emergency room episodes jumped 39 percent and are running at 155 percent above the 1990 level. Methamphetamine cases in 1994 rose 256 percent over the 1991 levels; heroine-related episodes, which had jumped 66 percent in 1993, remain at the same high level as 1994.

► ***Drug availability up:***

- "The price and purity of illegal substances on the street is an important, if imprecise, indicator of the availability of drugs. The data show that cheaper and purer drugs are getting through to American streets in greater quantities than ever before. Absent any evidence of a reduction in drug demand, it is reasonable to conclude that this reflects a substantial increase in supply" [*Losing Ground Against Drugs*, p. 7].
- Between February 1993 and February 1995, the retail price of a gram of cocaine fell from \$172 to \$137. Even larger drops were noted for heroin — from \$2,032 to \$1,278 per gram over the same period.
- The purity of street-level heroin has reached record levels, while cocaine is at near-record purity levels.

Giving up, Without a Fight

In September of 1993, the Clinton Administration announced a new approach to drug policy, promising to "reinvent our drug control programs" and "move beyond ideological debates." In short, the Administration deprioritized law enforcement and interdiction, while promising dividends from virtually unlimited treatment on demand.

► ***Enforcement efforts under pressure:***

- In Clinton's FY 1995 budget proposal, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), U.S. Customs Service, and the U.S. Coast Guard would have lost a total of 621 drug enforcement agents.
- While Congress restored many of these proposed cuts, under Clinton the DEA already has lost 227 agents between September 1992 and September 1995.

► ***Declining drug prosecutions:***

- The number of individuals prosecuted for federal drug violations dropped from

25,033 in 1992 to 23,114 in 1993 and still lower to 21,905 in 1994 — a 12 percent drop in just two years.

► ***Faltering interdiction efforts:***

- Between 1993 and the first six months of 1995, the transit zone “disruption rate” — which measures the ability of the U.S. to seize or otherwise turn back drug shipments — dropped 53 percent.

- **United States Customs Service**

- The overall proportion of the Customs Service budget devoted to drug control fell from 45.5 percent in FY91, to a projected 33.9 percent in FY96.
- The Clinton Administration cuts to the Customs Service interdiction budget coincided with a 70-percent decline in Customs-supported cocaine seizures in the transit-zone.
- The number of trafficker aircraft seized by Customs in the transit zone fell from 37 to 10 between 1993 and 1995.
- Transit zone flight hours, a rough indicator of the agency’s focus on interdiction, fell from 9,844 hours in 1993 to 6,870 hours in 1995.
- Customs Service interdiction appropriations have been cut nearly 20 percent between FY92 and FY95.
- The agency has had to mothball 22 fixed-wing aircraft and five sophisticated UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, vital tools in the interdiction effort.

- **Department of Defense**

- Between FYs 92-95, Defense interdiction budgets (known as “optempo”) were reduced by more than half.
- DoD airborne detection and monitoring assets were cut back from 3,400 to 1,850 hours during the same period.
- The use of Navy vessels (measured in so-called “steaming days”) was cut from 420 to 170 steaming days.
- Secretary of Defense William J. Perry has continuously failed to respond to Senate oversight requests for DoD’s contribution to drug supply reduction.

- **Coast Guard**

- The Coast Guard operating expense budget for drug missions fell from \$449.2 million in FY91 to a projected \$314.2 million in FY96.
- Cutter and aircraft resource hours for drug missions are projected to fall 23 and 34 percent, respectively, over the same period.
- The overall proportion of the Coast Guard budget devoted to drug control has fallen from 21 percent in FY91, to a projected 8 percent in fiscal year 1996.
- The agency has had to mothball five 82-foot patrol boats, three surface effect ships, seven HU-25 Falcon aircraft and one medium-endurance cutter.
- Coast Guard cocaine seizures remain 73 percent below the peak of FY91.

- Marijuana seizures fell even more drastically, more than 90 percent over the same period.
 - Coast Guard vessel seizures fell 88 percent, from 152 in FY89 to 19 in FY95.
- ***Controlled shift never implemented:***
- “The tradeoff for cuts to transit zone interdiction forces was to have been a new concentration on institution-building and interdiction in the source countries of Latin America.”
 - International counternarcotics funding to the Andean region fell abruptly, from \$334.9 million in 1993 to \$131.8 million in 1995 — a 60 percent drop, and significantly less than the \$470.3 million appropriated in 1992 under President Bush.
 - The Peruvian President’s hard-line war on drugs actually prompted the Clinton Administration to stop providing desperately vital radar tracking data.
- ***New focus on non-drug “transnational crime”:***
- The Clinton Administration is allowing specialized counternarcotics units to shift their focus away from the front-line war on drugs.
 - The Central Intelligence Agency’s Counter-Narcotics Center (CNC) has now been renamed the Crime and Narcotics Center, “reflecting a new focus on the collection of non-drug related intelligence.”
 - The Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics Matters has been reconstituted as the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, “reportedly attempting to inject itself into the coordination of the overseas activities of U.S. government law enforcement agencies.”
 - The Administration has allowed the Treasury Department’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) to devote 50 percent of its time to non-drug investigations, up from 20 percent in previous years. The President’s fiscal year 1996 budget actually proposed to cut the drug-related portion of FinCEN’s budget from \$15.8 million in fiscal year 1995 to \$11.1 million in fiscal year 1996.

Callous Apathy

On the one issue that disproportionately harms the poor — illicit drug use is ravaging many of the children of the poor — President Clinton and his Administration have accumulated a record of callous apathy. America cannot afford this lipservice war on drugs. Only a serious commitment to enforcement and interdiction efforts in combination with a forceful condemnation of illegal drug use will produce results and gain the upper hand in the war against drugs.

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[NOTE: All data for this paper are provided in *Losing Ground Against Drugs: A Report on Increasing Illicit Drug Use and National Drug Policy*, January 1996, prepared by the majority staff of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Senator Orrin G. Hatch, Chairman.]